

by Bob Saydlowski, Jr.



Joe Montineri Custom Snare Drums

I recently spent some time in Connecticut with Joe Montineri to check out the line of snare drums Joe is building. Nine different sizes of snare drums are available, all built of ten-ply pure rock maple wood (no "filler" plies). All the shells are seasoned for at least one year. Aside from the usual 14" diameter drums in 4", 5", 5 1/2", 6", 6 1/2", 7", and 8" depths, Joe is also making a lot of 4 x 12 and 5 x 12 soprano drums. These cannot be termed "piccolo" snares; a true piccolo is 13" in diameter. (No one

seems to make true piccolos nowadays, anyway; the "piccolos" out now are simply squashed 14" drums.)

All of Montineri's snare drums are hand-lacquer-finished, using 18 to 20 coats of nitrocellulose lacquer on the outside. The exterior ply is flame maple, which makes for a truly beautiful instrument once lacquered over. The shell interior is left unfinished, for non-reflective sound purposes. Tube-style brass lugs with two bolts each are used, and are available with chrome, brass, copper, nickel, or blue nickel plating. Matching hoops, rods, and washers with finishes other than chrome are available at an extra charge. All drums are eight-lug, except for the sopranos, which are six-lug. (An eight-lug soprano can be ordered.)

Three choices of bearing edge are available: crisp, general-purpose, or fat. The rounder the edge, the rounder the sound. As the customer, you also have a choice of hoops (pressed or cast), as well as a choice of spring, cable, or gut snares. Finishing is also your choice: Joe offers clear lacquers, one-color tints, sunbursts, solid lacquers, metallics, and centerbursts, as well as "esoteric wraps," such as black or white mother-of-pearl and black/gold glitter. Full dress diamond appliques are another option. Montineri feels that the drum you order is a very personal instrument, which is the reason for all the different choices and options. As a final touch, the customer's initials are engraved in the throw-off's fine-tune knob. There are even more options available (at extra charge), such as special ventholes, radical bearing edge cuts, engraving, and so on. By the way, Joe does everything except shoot the lacquer on the drums!

The throwoff is Montineri-designed. It looks extremely simplistic, but works like a dream. Utilizing a small stick lever, fine-tune knob, and dragnut, the throwoff responds effortlessly. As a result, fine tun-

ing the snare tension is smooth and very accurate. The entire assembly is silent and well-engineered.

I played a few of the soprano drums, with both crisp and general-purpose edges, and I can vouch for their cutting power and clarity of tone. Clear buzz rolls can be done even at the outermost portion of the head, which is merely a result of the drums' inherent sensitivity. The 14" drums have the same good qualities but, of course, at a lower pitch. All the drums speak extremely well. The available combinations of hoops, edges, snares, sizes, and heads will provide a unique sound, good for live playing and recording. Joe's idea to construct quality drums similar to the "old classics" has worked without fault.

I should also mention that Joe has his own special super-strong snare cord with a multi-core. I found the cord to work just great! Aside from being used on all of his drums, it's packaged and sold separately. As a sideline, Joe also creates some pretty neat T-shirts depicting patent blueprints of vintage percussion instruments.

Joe Montineri is extremely knowledgeable about drums and drum sounds, and put plainly, *knows* what he's doing. His background is evidence of this, as he worked in L.A. drum shops, ran a drum rental business there, and was drum technician for Vinnie Colaiuta, James Bradley, Jr., and the *Solid Gold* TV show.

Basic prices range from \$625 to \$750 for the 14" drums, and \$625 to \$650 for the 12" sopranos. It may seem expensive to some, but remember that, instead of getting a mass-production drum, you're buying a handmade, high-quality, personal instrument built to your specs. That in itself more than justifies the cost. Serious players and sound fanatics (like me) should definitely check these drums out! For more information, contact Joe Montineri, P.O. Box 3186, Vernon, CT 06066.

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